

**ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON FEMALE
IDENTIFYING ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

by
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Abstract

Social media is an integral part of most female-identifying adolescents' daily lives. As social media use has grown, the question of its influence on mental health and wellbeing has been examined without concrete answer. Due to this and the prevalence of social media use, it has been recommended that counsellors working with adolescents assess for social media's influence on adolescents' mental health and wellbeing. This capstone examined the research on assessing social media use in counselling and research on the influence of social media to determine what categories should be included in such an assessment. This research concluded that the following factors should be included in such an assessment: the duration and frequency of social media use, what social media platforms adolescents use, what forms of use they partake in, how adolescents are behaving online, the person of the adolescent user, and the role social media plays in their life. Finally, this capstone proposed a study to solidify the inclusion of these factors in a framework for counsellors to use to assess female identifying adolescents' social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing.

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Chapter 1 – Research Problem

In today's world, social media is an integral part of most adolescents' daily lives (O'Reilly, 2020; Schönning et al., 2020). Adolescent social media use, and popularity, is at an all-time high; and social media use is ubiquitous among adolescents (Casares & Binkley, 2021; de Vries et al., 2016; Schönning et al., 2020). Adolescents are spending more and more time online, using social media at greater frequency, for longer durations, and for many different functions (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). For the majority of Canadian adolescents, social media has become an inseparable component of their daily experience (Casares & Binkley, 2021).

With this increased usage, come widespread concerns for the mental health and wellbeing of adolescents (O'Reilly, 2020; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). Much research has been conducted in the hopes of developing a better understanding of how social media use influences adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Trifiro & Gerson, 2019). Within this research, studies have examined the relationship between adolescent social media use and specific aspects of mental health and wellbeing, such as anxiety, depression, and happiness, as well as the relationship between social media use and mental health and wellbeing overall (O'Reilly, 2020; Reid & Weigle, 2014). The focus has been on social media and pathology; and numerous studies that attest to the harms of social media have been produced (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020; Schönning et al., 2020; Viner et al., 2019). The risks of social media are generally overstated, the benefits understated, and the public discourse reflects this (O'Reilly, 2020). Overall, however, the research has produced mixed results, with the majority of studies reporting either insignificant or mixed outcomes (Best et al., 2014; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020;

Dolan, 2019; O'Reilly, 2020). While much research has been conducted, the question of how social media use influences adolescent mental health and wellbeing remains unanswered (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020).

Examined together, the research implies that the relationship between adolescent social media use and mental health and wellbeing is more complicated than a linear effect; pointing towards the constructivist ideology that experience is subjective and meanings are varied and multiple (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Weinstein, 2018). Through this ideology it fits that there are no conclusive results, as social media use is nuanced, experienced differently, and holds different meaning for every adolescent; thus influencing each adolescent differently (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Dolan, 2019; Sheldon et al., 2021; Weinstein, 2018).

Accordingly, when working with adolescents, counsellors would do well to assess social media use and its subjective influence on each individual adolescent's mental health and wellbeing (O'Reilly, 2020; Vente et al., 2020). As an integral part of adolescents' lives, failing to assess social media use and its influence is likely to leave counsellors with a gap in their understanding of adolescent client experiences (O'Reilly, 2020; Reid & Weigle, 2014).

While research has made the argument to assess adolescent social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing, there exist gaps in the research in terms of how to assess such influence (Eleuteri et al., 2017; O'Reilly, 2020; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Vente et al., 2020). This study will focus on this gap; and sets out to answer the following question: what should counsellors assess when working with female identifying adolescents in terms of their social media use and its influence on mental health and

wellbeing? With the intent of working towards the development of a framework to assess for the influence of social media on female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

This study has chosen to focus on female identifying adolescents due to research that has revealed that demographic factors influence the relationship between adolescent social media use and mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021). Gender identity influences how adolescents experience and are influenced by social media; and this must be considered when addressing this problem (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021).

Research Review

While many studies have been conducted to examine the potential influences of social media on adolescents, less have explored the need to assess social media use. Nonetheless, studies have argued that social media assessment should be included as a routine part of assessment, as in order to effectively work with adolescents, counsellors need to assess the role and influence of social media use on their lives (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Eleuteri et al., 2017; O'Reilly, 2020; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Vente et al., 2020). Counsellors should assess how adolescents are using social media, and how social media is both positively and negatively influencing their mental health and wellbeing (O'Reilly, 2020; Reid & Weigle, 2014). This can present another problem, as counsellors are not immune to the dominant discourse that labels social media use as harmful and presumes its influence to be negative (O'Reilly, 2020). Counsellors must balance the task of assessing social media from a non-judgemental perspective and determining if social media use may influence the challenges their clients present (O'Reilly, 2020).

While some research has identified the need for counsellors to assess adolescent social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing, less research exists around how and what counsellors should be assessing (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020). Although there is recognition of embodying adolescent centered practice and of not assuming the relationship between adolescent social media use and mental health and wellbeing to be negative, there lack specific categories that counsellors should assess (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Eleuteri et al., 2017; O'Reilly, 2020). Reid and Weigle (2014) offer one study that examines what counsellors should include in their assessment of adolescent social media use and its influence on their mental health and wellbeing. This study and other research that describes how social media use influences mental health and wellbeing will be examined in Chapter 2.

Research on female identifying adolescents and how they use social media is important to this study, as it speaks to what counsellors should be assessing when working with female identifying adolescents. As the research attests, female identifying adolescents use and experience social media differently than their peers (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021). Female identifying adolescents have been found to use social media more than their peers, and to have a greater susceptibility to the negative influences of social media (Bányai et al., 2017; Casares & Binkley, 2021; Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Schimmele et al., 2021). They are also more likely to use social media for social comparison, seeking feedback, and identity formation, which influences how social media impacts their mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021). Research that well defines the constructs of mental health and

wellbeing, and social media use, is also important to this study due to how this influences study results (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020).

While the current research is helpful, more research is needed that is specific to what counsellors should be assessing when working with female identifying adolescents, in terms of their social media use and its influence on their mental health and wellbeing. This leads to the significance of the present study.

Significance

This study adds to the research by supporting the development of a framework for counsellors to use to assess the influence of social media on female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing. This is significant, as it will address a gap in the current literature by offering factors counsellors should be assessing when working with individual adolescent clients. Utilizing a constructivist lens, further supports this study's significance, as it assumes that each adolescent experiences social media differently, which differs from the many studies that have examined group effects (Beyens et al., 2020). Finally, by focusing specifically on female identifying adolescents, this study adds to the literature as many past studies have focused on adolescents.

This study has the potential to improve counselling practice by encouraging counsellors to assess adolescent client social media use and its influence on their mental health and wellbeing; and by supporting the development of a non-biased framework to do so. By developing such a framework, this study could support counsellors to better assess and thereby better understand an integral aspect of adolescent clients' experience. Further, by including both the potential positive and negative influences of social media, this study could support counsellors to change how they view the influence of social

media use, as it is typically viewed negatively (Casares & Binkley, 2021; O'Reilly, 2020). If this study allows counsellors to better support their adolescent clients, it could also benefit female identifying adolescents seeking counselling support.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to develop a framework to assess the influence of social media use on Canadian female identifying adolescents' mental health and wellbeing. At this stage in the research, social media will be broadly defined as any technological platform that allows individuals to create, share, interact, and communicate with other users, inclusive of social networking sites and instant messengers (Coyne et al., 2014; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Schimmele et al., 2021).

Active social media use will be defined as using social media to interact with others; and passive social media use will be defined as looking at content on social media without interacting with others (Beyens et al., 2020; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020). Canadian female identifying adolescents will be generally defined as individuals between the ages of 12 and 19 that live in Canada and self identify as female. Mental health and wellbeing will be generally defined as an individual's emotional and psychological state of being (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020).

This study recognizes that mental health and wellbeing is a broad concept that encompasses many aspects of being, including but not limited to: depression, anxiety, mood, self-esteem, body image, and happiness (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020). While there is utility in research that focuses on each of the aforementioned aspects of mental health and wellbeing, for the purposes of this study, mental health and wellbeing will be broadly defined as described above.

Theoretical Orientation

This study will utilize a constructivist theoretical orientation, embodying the worldview that experiences are varied, multiple, and subjective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, this study will look for the complexity inherent in social media use to determine the various ways social media can influence mental health and wellbeing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Just as each female identifying adolescent's experience with social media will be different, so too will be the influence of social media on their mental health and wellbeing. The framework this study proposes to develop will acknowledge this by recommending what counsellors should assess when working with adolescents, without coming to conclusions as to the influence of social media use on female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing as a group.

Capstone Roadmap

As outlined in Chapter 1, the influence of social media use on female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing is unknown overall. This presents a problem, as counsellors working with female identifying adolescents are ill-equipped to understand how an influential part of adolescents' daily lives are influencing their mental health and wellbeing. As the data has provided inconclusive results, and social media use and resulting influence is diverse and complex, Chapter 1 proposed the need for a framework to be developed to assess the subjective influence of social media use on Canadian female identifying adolescents' mental health and wellbeing.

To develop a framework to assess the influence of social media use on Canadian female identifying adolescents' mental health and wellbeing, this study will explore the current literature to determine what should be considered when assessing such influence.

In Chapter 2, this study will examine research that considers: how social media can influence female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing, how different forms of use influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing, and how the person of the user may influence how social media use influences mental health and wellbeing. This study predicts that as further research is conducted, other factors related to social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing will emerge.

In Chapter 3, this study will analyze the research explored in Chapter 2 to work towards the development of a framework to assess the influence of social media use on female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing. This study will propose categories to be included in such a framework and will propose a study to confirm the inclusion of such categories and to determine any categories that may be missing.

Reflexivity and Positionality Statement

Having just missed the influx of digital technology and social media use as an adolescent myself, this topic is important to me for my current and future work with adolescents. Social media is a phenomenon I feel I lack understanding in; and requires understanding in to effectively work with adolescent clients. From this study I hope to take with me the knowledge required to assess the influence of social media use for female identifying adolescents.

Situating myself within this topic, I must acknowledge personal bias I hold about social media. Growing up without social media, I hold bias around the negative influences of social media outweighing the positives. I recognize that dominant discourse has influenced this bias, as social media is generally portrayed to have a harmful influence on mental health and wellbeing. Embarking on my research, this bias led me to

focus on the negative influences of social media without considering the positives. However, through research and recognizing my bias, I have been able to shift towards a more neutral view of social media; and this study will embody this neutral view to address the proposed problem. I also want to acknowledge that my experience as a white, able-bodied, educated, heterosexual, cis-gendered, privileged woman influences my understanding and analysis of this topic. While it is undeniable that social media influences adolescent mental health and wellbeing, for many adolescents there are greater forces at play such as systemic oppression, poverty, and marginalization. With this, I recognize that assessing for the influence of social media use on mental health and wellbeing will not be at the forefront of the work I do with every adolescent. By naming my privilege I hope to convey my recognition that many adolescents face issues more pressing than the influence of social media.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Chapter 1 outlined the need to assess the influence of social media on female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing. This chapter will analyze and discuss research that describes what counsellors should be assessing when working with female identifying adolescents in terms of their social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing. Building off of Lewis et al.'s (2012), Ohannessian and Vannucci's (2020), and Reid and Weigle's (2014) research, this chapter will discuss the utility of assessing: the duration and frequency of social media use, what social media platforms adolescents use, what forms of use they partake in, how adolescents are behaving online, the person of the adolescent user, and the role social media plays in their life.

Duration and Frequency of Use

In today's technology-driven world, almost all adolescents use social media, with most adolescents engaging with social media on a daily basis (Dolan, 2019; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020; Petropoulos Petalas et al., 2021). Due to this, many studies have examined adolescent social media usage and its influence on mental health and wellbeing. This section will discuss research that examines how social media usage influences adolescent mental health and wellbeing, focusing on the duration and frequency of use. This section will also analyze research that examines social media use with addictive qualities, otherwise termed problematic usage.

Duration

With the influx of social media usage, came many concerns about the prevalence of use. This led at first to the displacement hypothesis, the idea that online activities displace offline ones; and the more time spent on social media, the worse one's mental

health and wellbeing would be (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). Today, however, this hypothesis has been negated by the Goldilocks hypothesis, the idea that moderate social media use is ‘just right’ in our technologically connected society (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). Research has supported this hypothesis, proving that in general moderate social media use is related to increased mental health and wellbeing, with both low and excessive use being related to decreased mental health and wellbeing (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017; Weinstein, 2018). This explains why the many research studies that examined the number of social media platforms used or overall time spent on social media produced inconclusive results (Weinstein, 2018). The relationship between social media use and mental health and wellbeing is not linear (Weinstein, 2018). Moderate use appears to be the optimal amount of usage; and counsellors should be assessing the duration of adolescent social media use based on this benchmark (Weinstein, 2018).

Other studies have made claims about the relationship between the duration of social media usage and mental health and wellbeing. Observational studies have found spending 2 or more hours on social media per day to be problematic, negatively influencing female identifying adolescents’ mental health and wellbeing (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). In particular, these studies have found social media use to be linked to suicidality, depression, and psychological distress (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Biernesser, 2019). Abi-Jaoude et al. (2020) also speak to adolescents’ perceptions of their social media use duration, sharing that approximately half of adolescents feel they spend too much time on their smartphones. When assessing the duration of adolescents’ social media use for its influence on their mental health and wellbeing, counsellors should be

assessing if the duration of use is greater than ‘just right’ or in other words problematic (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). Counsellors should also assess how adolescents perceive their social media use, as will be further discussed in the ‘Social Media’s Role’ section (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).

Frequency

The frequency of social media use is another cause for concern in the dominant discourse, stemming from statistics that claim that a 25–45 % of adolescents check their smartphones almost constantly (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Dolan, 2018; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Substantial research has been conducted about the frequency of social media use and adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Marino, 2018). When examining this research, it is essential to distinguish between frequent and problematic use, as they have been proven to be different experiences (Marino, 2018). Frequent use refers to using social media multiple times a day; and problematic use refers to use that gets in the way of the users’ daily activities, and is characterized by the constant need to check one’s phone (Marino, 2018; Schimmele et al., 2021). This section will discuss frequent use.

Many studies have been conducted on the negative effects of frequent social media use on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. Frequent social media use has been linked to externalizing behaviours in vulnerable youth, negative affect, lower life satisfaction, lower mental health and wellbeing overall, and is seen as a risk factor for problematic use (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020; Schimmele et al., 2021; Seabrook et al., 2016; Viner et al., 2019). It should be noted, however, that studies do distinguish between types of social media usage, stating that an individuals experience on social

media effects how the frequency of use influences mental health and wellbeing (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020; Seabrook et al., 2016). Many studies attest that the way social media is being used and the function it serves better predicts how it will influence a users mental health and wellbeing than frequency (Mahase, 2019; Viner et al., 2019, Salomon & Brown, 2019; Seabrook et al., 2016).

A study conducted in England, gathered data from 12,000 adolescents, around social media frequency and mental health and wellbeing (Viner et al., 2019). This study found that while frequent social media use predicted lower mental health and wellbeing for female identifying adolescents, once the confounding variables of cyberbullying and lack of sleep were adjusted for, the relationship between social media frequency and mental health and wellbeing was no longer specific (Mahase, 2019; Viner et al., 2019). “This finding suggests that the harmful effects of frequent social media use on mental health and wellbeing in girls are mainly driven by the enablement of cyberbullying and by disruption of sleep” (Viner et al., 2019, p. 694). Thus, when assessing female identifying adolescents frequency of social media use, counsellors should assess if cyberbullying and sleep disruption are taking place, as these are better predictors of mental health and wellbeing than the frequency of social media use in itself (Mahase, 2019; Viner et al., 2019).

On a similar note, another aspect of frequency of social media use to consider is when social media use is taking place. As Przybylski and Weinstein (2017) describe, not all social media activities are created equal. Adolescent social media use during the week is more likely to interfere with school, homework, and sleep (Przybylski & Weinstein,

2017). This should be considered when assessing how social media use influences adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

Problematic Use

Problematic use is another area that has received much attention with increased social media use societally (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Dolan, 2018; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). As described, problematic or addictive use refers to use that is characterized by the constant need to check one's device in order to access social media and use that gets in the way of the users daily activities (Marino, 2018). Problematic social media use has been linked to depression, decreased life satisfaction, suicidality, and decreased overall mental health and wellbeing (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Biernesser, 2019; Marino, 2018). In fact, adolescents themselves acknowledge the addictive quality of social media to be a negative consequence of social media use (O'Reilly et al., 2018). In a focus group study conducted in the UK, adolescents recognized their dependence on their phones and their desire to check their phones frequently (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Problematic use can get in the way of adolescents' daily life tasks, influencing their mental health and wellbeing; and should be assessed when working with adolescents (O'Reilly et al., 2018).

Research has also been conducted to determine who is at risk for problematic social media usage. While scarce information is known about risk factors and vulnerabilities that interact with problematic social media usage, female identifying adolescents are one group who appear more likely to experience problematic social media use (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Marino, 2018). Awareness of this is important for counsellors working with female identifying adolescents.

Usage and Sleep

Lack of sleep is a notable consequence of high duration, high frequency, and problematic social media usage that adolescents themselves acknowledge as a negative influence of social media use (O'Reilly et al., 2018). Sleep has a significant influence on mental health and wellbeing; and increased or high social media use can disrupt sleep throughout the night and shorten sleep duration (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). Interrupted or shortened sleep results in decreased mental health and wellbeing, influencing anxiety, depression, stress, externalizing behaviours, self esteem, coping ability, and mental health and wellbeing overall (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Mahase, 2019; Viner et al., 2019). As described in the 'Frequency' section, sleep is an integral component of social media use to assess for, as it has a significant influence on mental health and wellbeing.

Conclusion of Duration and Frequency of Use

This section discussed studies that examine the relationship between social media usage and adolescent mental health and wellbeing. And while these studies are useful and provide a base for assessing the influence of social media, usage alone does not predict how social media use influences adolescents (O'Reilly, 2020). The rest of this chapter will outline other aspects that effect social media's influence on adolescent mental health and wellbeing, starting with social media platforms.

Social Media Platforms

In the ever-changing digital landscape, social media platforms are continually evolving (Weller, 2016). New platforms are introduced, non-adapting platforms are lost, and the platforms that are able to remain relevant continue to change their functionalities and user interface (Weller, 2016). User interest also continues to evolve (Ohannessian &

Vannucci, 2020). The past popular Facebook and Twitter, are no longer preferred by adolescents, who now favour Instagram, Whatsapp, Snap Chat, Youtube, and TikTok; and regularly use more than one platform a day (Bányai et al., 2017; Beyens et al., 2020; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). These continual changes make social media platforms challenging to research, as results frequently become out-dated (Weller, 2016).

Nonetheless, much research has been conducted to examine how the unique features of each social media platform influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Keipi et al., 2017; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020; Sheldon et al., 2021; Weller, 2016). This section will discuss the research that describes how different social media platforms influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing, examining research on specific platforms and research on platform functionality overall. Different social media platforms are used for diverse purposes, appeal to diverse users, offer diverse functions, and interact with mental health and wellbeing in diverse ways (Keipi et al., 2017). When assessing social media use, counsellors should assess what platforms adolescents are using, and what they are using these platforms for (Reid & Weigle, 2014).

Facebook

Facebook is a text and photo-based platform that offers users multiple functionalities with various levels of privacy (Sheldon et al., 2021). Facebook offers users the ability to: post status updates, post pictures and videos, tag themselves and others in pictures, comment and like posts and pictures, friend other users, join groups, and send private messages (Sheldon et al., 2021). Facebook gives users the ability to control whom they are connected to and who sees the content they post; and is generally used by users to interact with people they already know and have strong ties with (Keipi

et al., 2017). These functionalities impact how Facebook influences mental health and wellbeing.

The influence of Facebook on adolescent mental health and wellbeing has received much attention over the past several years. Studies have found Facebook to be correlated with externalizing behaviours, antisocial behaviours, social comparison, body image concerns, mood, and other various components of negative mental health and wellbeing (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020; Verduyn et al., 2017). However, studies have also found Facebook to have no significant negative influence on mental health and wellbeing; and some studies have even found the relationship between Facebook use and mental health and wellbeing to be positive (Keipi et al., 2017; Verduyn et al., 2017). This is a trend seen across the research of all specific platforms and is in part due to the way each platform is being used and how different forms of use influence mental health and wellbeing (Keipi et al., 2017; Verduyn et al., 2017). This will be discussed in further detail in the 'Forms of Use' section.

When considering the research on Facebook, it is important to keep in mind the trends of adolescent social media platform use. As already mentioned, Facebook popularity has greatly declined among adolescents over the past few years, and is no longer the most popular platform (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). While adolescents might still use Facebook to express themselves, form and maintain friendships, and much more, Facebook is unlikely to be the dominant platform adolescents are using (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). However, as Facebook can both positively and negatively influence adolescents' mental health and wellbeing, it is still a platform worth assessing if used by adolescents.

Twitter

As a social media platform, what distinguishes Twitter is its focus on short textual messages or ‘tweets,’ as well as its use of hashtags (Keipi et al., 2017). Further, Twitter is generally considered to be more of a public platform than other types of social media; and is generally used to interact with weaker ties, individuals outside of one’s close group of friends and family, including celebrities and influencers (Keipi et al., 2017). This can be positive if it increases an individual’s social capital and negative if it increases social comparison (Keipi et al., 2017). This again speaks to the way a platform is being used, suggesting that the way a platform is used has greater influence than the platform itself, which will be further addressed in the ‘Forms of Use’ section. Similarly to Facebook, Twitter popularity has decreased among adolescents over the last several years (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Yet, if it is a platform adolescent clients are using, it is worth assessing as it can influence mental health and wellbeing.

Instagram

Instagram is an image driven platform that offers users the ability to: post photos and videos, edit photos and videos using filters, comment and like posts, share posts, send direct messages to users, and follow friends, peers, celebrities and influencers (Sheldon et al., 2021). Due to Instagram’s focus on images and its in-app ability to edit, Instagram has garnered many concerns in terms of its influence on adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 2021; “Instagram is the worst,” 2019). While Instagram can facilitate self-expression, self-presentation, creativity, and relationships, it can also lead adolescents to partake in social comparison due to many posts that promote perfection (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Keipi et al., 2017). Many articles have addressed

the potential negatives of Instagram; and in one survey study of 1,500 adolescents living in the UK, Instagram was rated as the worst social media for mental health based on sleep, anxiety, depression, fear of missing out, and body image (Casares & Binkley, 2021; “Instagram is the worst,” 2019). The concerns surrounding Instagram are especially prevalent for female identifying adolescents who are more likely to seek validation from their peers (“Instagram is the worst,” 2019; Van Ouytsel et al., 2020).

Like Twitter, Instagram users are more likely to interact with users outside of their close friend groups, which can similarly boost their social capital or negatively influence their mental health and wellbeing through social comparison (Keipi et al., 2017). Additionally, Instagram users have more control over the ‘followers’ that can view their content and the users they follow and consequently view the content of (Keipi et al., 2017). This too influences how adolescents Instagram use supports or hinder users mental health and wellbeing due to relational benefits (Keipi et al., 2017). The content posted and viewed on Instagram, as with all other platforms, also impacts its influence; and will be discussed in the ‘Behaviours’ section. Finally, how Instagram is used matters. As is across platforms, when Instagram is used to interact with others, building or maintaining relationship, mental health and wellbeing are likely to benefit (Keipi et al., 2017).

The majority of adolescents who use social media use Instagram; and in one study, Instagram was rated as the most important social media platform (Brown et al., 2018; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Instagram plays a significant role in many adolescents’ daily lives; and should be assessed for its influence on adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

Whatsapp

Whatsapp is a private message-based platform that allows users to communicate one on one or in groups (Keipi et al., 2017). Whatsapp is generally used to communicate one on one with family members and close friends, which reinforces social ties; and impacts how Whatsapp influences mental health and wellbeing. (Keipi et al., 2017). In one study, Whatsapp was found to improve mental health and wellbeing due to the type of use it promotes; specifically how it fosters communication and close relationships (Beyens et al., 2020).

From the research, it is unclear how popular Whatsapp is with today's adolescents. In one study, Whatsapp was found to rank in the top five platforms used by adolescents (Beyens et al., 2020). However, this study was based in the Netherlands, and is unlikely to be representative of adolescents in Canadian culture (Beyens et al., 2020).

SnapChat

Snapchat is an image-based social media platform that allows users to send pictures or videos called 'snaps' to individuals, multiple individuals, and groups (Sheldon et al., 2021). Snapchat is distinguished from other platforms through its disappearing messages that delete after being viewed (Sheldon et al., 2021). Thus, snaps tend to be more casual than the "carefully posed and edited selfies that characterize Instagram" (Sheldon et al., 2021, p. 1113). While snaps can be shared with all of a user's contacts as a 'story,' Snapchat use tends to be more private; and users tend to use Snapchat to connect with their strong social ties such as close friends (Sheldon et al., 2021). This impacts how Snapchat influences mental health and wellbeing, as this type of use fosters relationships. Finally, another distinguishing feature of Snapchat is how it offers users the

ability to include filters, drawings, and text, on their images if they wish (Sheldon et al., 2021). This can support adolescent creativity and self-expression, making Snapchat an attractive platform for adolescents (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). As one of the most popular social media platforms used amongst adolescents, Snapchat use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing should be assessed (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020).

Youtube

Youtube is a video-sharing platform, where users can create, share, and watch videos. Like many social media platforms, Youtube influences adolescent trends and popular culture (Casares & Binkley, 2021). In particular, Youtube influencers may have a large impact on adolescents (Casares & Binkley, 2021).

While there is a lack of research that has been conducted on adolescent Youtube use and its influence on adolescent mental health and wellbeing, Youtube is one of the popular social media platforms that adolescents use (Beyens et al., 2020; Casares & Binkley, 2021). Youtube's influence on mental health and wellbeing should be assessed when working with adolescents; particularly what content adolescents are viewing.

TikTok

TikTok is a video based social media platform where users can create, share, watch, like, and comment on short videos called Tiktoks. TikTok differs from Youtube as videos are shorter in length and users have the ability to edit in app. Further, TikTok offers users a homepage that uses an algorithm based on past videos watched to bring up similar videos for users to watch in the future (Logrieco et al., 2021). If an adolescent views one video that negatively influences their mental health and wellbeing, TikTok is

likely to unknowingly offer other similar videos, which can further negatively influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Logrieco et al., 2021).

As a newer social media platform, less is known about the influence of TikTok use on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. However, as it is one of the most popular social media platforms amongst adolescents, its use should be assessed for its influence on adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Logrieco et al., 2021). When making such an assessment counsellors should consider the other the categories of social media use, including the form of use, content viewed, and how users are behaving online. These categories will be further discussed in the following sections.

Discussion Forums

Discussion forums are a type of social media platform that allow users to post questions and answers, post comments, and read through forums. Discussion forums differ from the platforms already described, as they tend to be less interactive and users are more likely to present anonymously, resulting in users having less control in whom they are connected with (Keipi et al., 2017). This effects how discussion forums influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing. While discussion forums can offer users an outlet for expression and interaction, due to the less direct interactions and anonymity, discussion forums have been shown to have a negative association with life satisfaction, which is a component of mental health and wellbeing (Keipi et al., 2017). This may be different if users are directly messaging others on discussion forums, speaking to form of use, which will be discussed in detail in the 'Form of Use' section (Keipi et al., 2017). However, due to the anonymity of discussion forums, users are less likely to develop long

term strong relationships which influences how discussion forms influence mental health and wellbeing (Keipi et al., 2017).

While the research does not speak to the popularity of discussion forums, like all other social media platforms its use should be assessed as discussion forums can influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

Functionalities Across Platforms

When assessing the influence of different platform usage on adolescent mental health and wellbeing, there are several factors to consider in terms of platform functionalities and how adolescents use such functions. These include: the type of interaction, such as one on one, group, private, or public; the functions it offers, such as posting, liking, sharing, messaging; the type of users being interacted with, such as offline friends, online friends, strangers, peers, celebrities; the self presentation of the user, such as visual anonymity, pseudo anonymity, offline identity; the types of benefits it offers, such as building and maintaining friendships, developing identity, expanding social capital; and finally the risks of using each social media platform, such as cyberbullying, social comparison, exposure to risky behaviours (Keipi et al., 2017). As the previous list demonstrates, social media platforms offer diverse functionalities that facilitate diverse forms of use (Keipi et al., 2017). This diversity results in a complicated relationship between social media platform use and mental health and wellbeing (Best et al., 2014; Keipi et al., 2017). While no conclusions can be drawn between social media platform and mental health and wellbeing alone, there is utility in assessing what platforms adolescents are using and how they are using them, as this can give counsellors

insights into factors that may be influencing adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Reid & Weigle, 2014).

Conclusion of Social Media Platforms

This section described many of the popular social media platforms that today's adolescent's use. It discussed the functionalities of each platform, how each platform may influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing, and the platforms popularity. This section also began to describe other factors that impact how social media platforms influence mental health and wellbeing, including how adolescents use these platforms and what they use them for. The following section will analyze what adolescents use these platforms for, focusing specifically on the form of use and how this influences mental health and wellbeing.

Forms of Use

“The ways in which adolescents use a media form and the reasons they do so are likely to be more important than the details of the platform or technology alone” (Reich et al., 2012, p. 357). How adolescents interact on social media, significantly affects social media's influence on mental health and wellbeing, as different types of interaction serve different functions and result in different influences (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Weinstein, 2018). This section will discuss these differences in interaction behaviours and will analyze research that examines the difference between active and passive social media use. This section will first define these terms, followed by a discussion of the research on active and passive use. It will then conclude by examining research specific to female identifying adolescents and research about predictors of use.

Definitions of Active and Passive Use

While active and passive social media use were initially defined in Chapter 1, this section will provide more detailed definitions for each construct. Chapter 1 defined active social media as using social media to interact with others; and passive social media use as looking at content on social media without interacting with other users (Beyens et al., 2020; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020).

Active social media use refers to online behaviours that facilitate interactions between the user and other users (Frison & Eggermont, 2020; Trifiro & Gerson, 2019). “Such behaviors include liking, commenting, sending messages, and otherwise engaging with other users,” which constitutes as active use (Trifiro & Gerson, 2019). If the user is contributing or creating, this constitutes as active social media use; and this includes interactions that take place one on one and in groups, in private and public spaces (Frison & Eggermont, 2020; Trifiro & Gerson, 2019).

Passive social media use comprises of viewing content on social media without interacting with other users (Frison & Eggermont, 2020; Trifiro & Gerson, 2019). Passive social media use can be characterized as consuming social media, and includes users monitoring or watching content that others post (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Trifiro & Gerson, 2019).

Active Versus Passive Use

Extensive research has been conducted to examine the differing influence of active and passive social media use on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. And overall, the research has found active use supports mental health and wellbeing, whereas passive use diminishes mental health and wellbeing (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Frison &

Eggermont, 2020; Nowland et al., 2018; Reich et al., 2012; Schimmele et al., 2021; Trifiro & Gerson, 2019; Verduyn et al., 2017). Research that speaks to the influence of active use will be described first, followed by research on passive use.

Research has found active social media use to positively influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing for various reasons. Active social media use promotes connection, allowing users to build and maintain meaningful social relationships, which supports social capital and connectedness, enhances wellbeing and life satisfaction, and subsequently decreases loneliness and depression (Booker et al., 2018; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Nowland et al., 2018; Schimmele et al., 2021; Verduyn et al., 2017). Active social media use supports friendships, and can result in increased intimacy, trust, commitment, and communication (Reich et al., 2012). Active use can also increase perceived friend support, decreasing loneliness and depression (Booker et al., 2018).

Many studies have been conducted to test the general relationship between active social media use and wellbeing. Conducting a meta-analysis on this relationship, Verduyn et al. (2017) found the majority of studies find the relationship between active social media use and wellbeing to be positive, with a minority of studies finding an insignificant relationship. This appears to be due to the relationship between active social media use and social capital and connectedness, as described above (Keipi et al., 2017; Verduyn et al., 2017).

In contrast to active use, passive social media use has been found to negatively influence mental health and wellbeing (Beyens et al., 2020; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Frison & Eggermont, 2016). Passive social media use has been linked to loneliness, social comparison, depression, and low self-esteem, all of which decrease mental health

and wellbeing (Booker et al., 2018; Nowland et al., 2018; Schimmele et al., 2021; Seabrook et al., 2016). Many studies examining the relationship between passive social media use and overall wellbeing have concluded the relationship is negative (Booker et al., 2018; Verduyn et al., 2017). It is also important to note that passive social media usage has been found to be more frequent than active usage (Verduyn et al., 2017).

Female Identifying Users

While most of the research thus far has examined the influence of active and passive use on adolescents in general, some research has been conducted specifically on female identifying adolescents. In a study of 1100 Flemish adolescents with data collected at three points, Frison and Eggermont (2016) found that female identifying adolescents spent more time both passively and actively using Facebook. This is reflective of the research on gender differences in social media use; and is important to consider in terms of how passive and active use influence female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Frison & Eggermont, 2016). As female identifying adolescents are more prone to social comparison, passive use can be particularly harmful (Frison & Eggermont, 2016). On the contrary, active use can be especially beneficial, as it supports female identifying adolescent developmental and social role needs (Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017). While this study specifically examined active and passive use in the context of Facebook, it is likely generalizable across platforms based on other research that has found female identifying adolescents to use social media more than their peers Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021).

Predictors of Forms of Use

Social media usage differs from user to user, with different patterns of usage leading to different mental health implications (Brandtzaeg, 2012). As Trifero and Gerson (2019) describe:

“How individuals interact with social media (and therefore their usage patterns) likely changes depending on a variety of circumstances such as access device (i.e., laptop or smartphone), context (i.e., on a bus, at home), or mood (i.e., are users who are already in a negative mood more likely to be passive users?). (p. 2).

Usage patterns will also depend on a user’s motivation for use, such as relationship maintenance, boredom, communication, and much more (Barker, 2009; Frison & Eggermont, 2016). Scarce research has been conducted to determine what predicts different forms of social media use; and this becomes more complicated as individuals often shift back and forth from active to passive use in one session of using social media (Frison & Eggermont, 2020; Trifero & Gerson, 2019). While form of use may be unpredictable, it can and should be assessed due to its influence on adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

Conclusion of Forms of Use

As described in this past section, the form of social media use is influential, with research finding active use to positively influence mental health and wellbeing, and passive use to negatively influence mental health and wellbeing. Combining this information with usage duration and frequency and specific platform use, allows for a deeper understanding of adolescent social media usage and its relationship to mental

health and wellbeing (Brandtzaeg, 2012). To further this understanding, the next section will discuss specific behaviours adolescents partake in on social media.

Adolescent Social Media Behaviours

The behaviours adolescents participate in on social media greatly impact how social media influences their mental health and wellbeing. As Reid and Weigle (2014) attest, “it is important to inquire about the different social media websites the adolescent frequents and to understand what specifically they are using these sites for” (p. 78). This section will address what adolescents use social media platforms for, examining the different behaviours that adolescents engage in, and what counsellors should assess. It will analyze research on: adolescent developmental stage, building and maintaining friendships, social network size and structure, family relationship maintenance, identity development, sexuality development, discovering communities, social comparison, body image, sexual self-presentation, sexting, other risky behaviours, and viewing content about self harm, suicide, and eating disorders. This section will end by examining research that describes the See Saw effect of social media use, offering guidance for social media assessment.

Developmental Stage

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by biological change, identity formation, and relational and sexual development, where adolescents are tasked with finding their sense of self, uncovering where they belong in society, and developing close peer relationships (Eleuteri et al., 2017; Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Murray et al., 2017). In today’s world, social media offers adolescents “a new social setting to combat the developmental tasks faced in their offline worlds” (Frison & Eggermont, 2016, p.

183). Social media can allow adolescents to: build and maintain peer friendships, experiment with their identity, and seek feedback and validation from their peers (Scherr & Brunet, 2017; Van Ouytsel et al., 2020; Weinstein, 2018). When assessing social media use, counsellors should assess how adolescents' social media behaviours support or contradict their developmental tasks, and thus their mental health and wellbeing. Greater specifics of these developmental behaviours will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

Building and Maintaining Friendships

Building and maintaining peer relationships is one of the most significant aspects of adolescent development; and is one of the major reasons adolescents use social media (Eleuteri et al., 2017; Best et al., 2014; Reich et al., 2012; Verduyn et al., 2017). Social media use can support adolescents to build and maintain friendships by: fostering communication and intimacy, promoting social interactions and displays of affection, allowing adolescents to spend time together online, and creating an environment where adolescents can plan for offline activities (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Odgers, 2018; Reid & Weigle, 2014). When used in this way, social media can stimulate and strengthen existing relationships, and can be used to develop new relationships, supporting the fundamental human need of social interaction (Coyne et al., 2014; Nowland et al., 2018; Reich et al., 2012; Schimmele et al., 2021; Seabrook et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017).

By using social media to build and maintain relationships, adolescents can generate social support, and greater intimacy in relationships, which positively influences mental health and wellbeing (Best et al., 2014; Seabrook et al., 2016). Social media offers adolescents the opportunity to enrich their social worlds, allowing them to connect with a

wider circle of friends, communicate easily and freely with friends, and express themselves, which can reduce loneliness, depression, and anxiety, improve social bonds, and increase feelings of belonging and life satisfaction (Brandtzaeg, 2012; Nowland et al., 2018; Reich et al., 2012; Seabrook et al., 2016). Further, social media allows adolescents to “augment the benefits of engaging in face-to-face interaction by extending the reach and accessibility of [their] social networks” (Seabrook et al., 2016, p. 2). This is important as social support is a major influence on mental health and wellbeing; with those who report being more socially connected, also reporting greater mental health (McLouglin et al., 2018; Verduyn et al., 2017). This “is further emphasised when one considers the psychological costs associated with the suppression of emotions caused by limited social support” (Best et al., 2014, p. 28). The way social media interacts with mental health and wellbeing is in part reflective of the quality of social interaction in the social media environment (Seabrook et al., 2016).

Social media can also be particularly helpful for adolescents who are shy or experience social anxiety, as it can provide a less daunting environment for friendships to be built and maintained, by reducing barriers to social participation (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Reid & Weigle, 2014). This can be beneficial for adolescents, as the promotion of relationship quality positively influences mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 2021). Further, if adolescents feel protected through the screen they are more likely to share intimate disclosures, which further benefits relationship quality (Casares & Binkley, 2021).

For female identifying adolescents in particular, social media appears to be an essential tool for building and maintaining relationships (Brandtzaeg, 2012). In

comparison to their peers, female identifying adolescents are more likely to use, and more frequently use, social media for socializing; and are more likely to feel excluded if they are unable to access social media (Brandtzaeg, 2012).

Social Network Size and Structure

Social network size and structure is an aspect of social media use that research has examined for its influence on mental health and wellbeing, producing mixed results (Schimmele et al., 2021; Seabrook et al., 2016). While some studies report that having a large number of social media friends' supports mental health and wellbeing by increasing life satisfaction and one's perception of social integration, other studies report that the size of one's social media network may be irrelevant as social media users are unlikely to prune such networks (Schimmele et al., 2021; Seabrook et al., 2016). However, impoverished social networks may be reflective of depression and anxiety, as social support can protect against these mental health challenges (Seabrook et al., 2016). With this, another aspect to consider is the quality of the social media friendships, as higher quality interactions and friendships have greater positive influence on mental health and wellbeing, than weaker quality interactions and weaker relationship ties (Keipi et al., 2017; Seabrook et al., 2016). Additionally, one should consider if adolescents are using social media to support offline or online relationships (Reich et al., 2012). If social media is used to support relationships that only exist online, this may detract from offline relationships, decreasing mental health and wellbeing; and may be risky if adolescents are connecting with strangers (Reich et al., 2012).

When assessing adolescents' social network size and structure, counsellors should assess how adolescents perceive their network, as this is likely to be more reflective of

their experience than network size itself; the quality of friendships and interactions adolescents experience on social media; and if adolescents are interacting with offline or online friends (Keipi et al., 2017; Reich et al., 2012; Schimmele et al., 2021; Seabrook et al., 2016).

Family Relationship Maintenance

While adolescents commonly use social media to build and maintain relationships with their peers, social media can also be used to build and maintain relationships with family members. Social media can be used to support communication and connection among family members; and to support family functioning, the ability to communicate openly and experience healthy interactions (Coyne et al., 2014). Families can use social media as a tool to strengthen their social ties, allowing parents to be more involved in adolescents' lives, and encouraging parent/ adolescent interaction and adolescent disclosure (Coyne et al., 2014). This can positively influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing by increasing emotional support and connection between adolescents and their caregivers (Coyne et al., 2014).

Identity Development

Development of a firm and secure sense of identity is an important task and primary goal of adolescence; and is another dominant reason why adolescents use social media (Bates et al., 2020; Eleuteri et al., 2017; Keipi et al., 2017; Meyer, 2021; Reich et al., 2012; Reid & Weigle, 2014). Adolescents can use social media to “explore various ways to present themselves and ‘be’ in the world,” through self-presentation and self-disclosure (Eleuteri et al., 2017, p. 355; Reid & Weigle, 2014). Social media can also allow adolescents to receive feedback and validation from their peers, enhancing self and

group identity (Eleuteri et al., 2017; Meyer, 2021; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). Additionally, social media can allow for greater flexibility and creativity in the identity development process, particularly if adolescents engage with social media anonymously or pseudonymously (Bates et al., 2020; Meyer, 2021). Being able to experiment with identity is a benefit of adolescent social media use that can positively influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Eleuteri et al., 2017; Meyer, 2021; O'Reilly et al., 2018).

While using social media to develop identity supports adolescents with tasks of development, it also adds another task that previous generations did not experience, as adolescents today must also develop an online identity (Bates et al., 2020; Eleuteri et al., 2017). This can present challenges to adolescent mental health and wellbeing if adolescents: struggle to find their online identity, allow likes and comments to influence their sense of self-esteem, or find maintaining different identities across platforms challenging, which can be especially prevalent for adolescents who do not fit neatly into socially acceptable categories of being (Bates et al., 2020; Eleuteri et al., 2017). However, “what clinicians need to understand is that the use of technology by adolescents is mostly not harmful, and it is an important aspect of their identity development, as well as the development of their relationships and sexuality” (Eleuteri et al., 2017, p. 360).

Sexuality Development

The development of one's sexual and gender identity is another critical and normative task of adolescence (Eleuteri et al., 2017; Bates et al., 2020). Social media can support this development, by providing adolescents with an accessible space to explore

their gender and sexuality without restrictions (Eleuteri et al., 2017). Adolescents can talk to friends and intimate partners, conduct research, and participate in consensual cybersex (Eleuteri et al., 2017). Social media can also allow adolescents to project and express their identities, allowing them to revise and reshuffle these as necessary as they learn about who they are (Bates et al., 2020). This can be especially beneficial for adolescents who identify as LGBTQ+ (Bates et al., 2020).

Social media can provide LGBTQ+ adolescents access to safe communities, where adolescents can: share their experiences, self disclose, come out, access relevant information, engage in intimate encounters, and construct and express their identities (Bates et al., 2020; Norton, 2016). This can positively influence identity development and therefore mental health and wellbeing, as adolescents are able to explore and engage in development in an accepting and affirming environment (Bates et al., 2020). This can be especially supportive for LGBTQ+ adolescents, as they are often more vulnerable to experiencing hopelessness and other symptoms of depression, due to experiences of discrimination and not belonging (Norton, 2016).

While social media can provide a positive environment for adolescents to develop their gender and sexual identities, engaging in online sexual activities also presents risks (Eleuteri et al., 2017). Interacting on social media can decrease adolescents' inhibitions, hasten sexual intimacy, and allow for adolescents to present an identity that does not correspond with their offline identity (Eleuteri et al., 2017). Additionally, social media may expose adolescents to inappropriate sexually explicit content (Eleuteri et al., 2017). These experiences can lead to negative consequences, which can negatively influence

mental health and wellbeing (Eleuteri et al., 2017). This will be described further in the ‘Sexual Self Presentation,’ ‘Sexting,’ and ‘Other Risky Behaviours,’ sections.

For adolescents, and LGBTQ+ adolescents, in particular, challenges may arise if they are presenting differently across different social media platforms (Bates et al., 2020). How an adolescent presents their identity can be complex due to different audiences on different platforms, and this can cause stress for adolescents due to the risk of unintentional disclosure in non-supportive environments, negatively influencing mental health and wellbeing (Bates et al., 2020).

Discovering Communities

As described in the previous section, social media can provide adolescents access to online communities that differ from mainstream culture (Reid & Weigle, 2014). And while this includes LGBTQ+ groups and communities, there exist many other communities adolescents can explore and be a part of, including communities of individuals who share interests, values, and cultures (Norton, 2016; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Schimmele et al., 2021). When used in this way, social media can enable adolescents to build connections they would not be able to offline, fostering mental health and wellbeing through belonging and connection (Schimmele et al., 2021).

For adolescents who identify as a cultural minority, social media can provide a unique opportunity to express their cultural identities and connect with other adolescents of similar identity, as this might not be possible in offline contexts (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). This can support identity development and mental health and wellbeing; and may constitute one reason for adolescents to use social media (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). However, due to the perceived anonymity of social

media, cultural minority adolescents may be at greater risk of discrimination online than they are in their offline worlds, which can negatively influence their mental health and wellbeing (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020).

Social Comparison

While social comparison is a normative behaviour of adolescence, social media has exacerbated this behaviour (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021). Today's adolescents are being constantly exposed to idealized images of their peers, as pictures that are posted on social media are chosen most often to represent the user in overly flattering ways (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021; Verduyn et al., 2017). And while awareness of this can help adolescents to decrease social comparison, the highly personalized nature of the content posted on social media allows the content to appear more real (Ho et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017). This influences how adolescents perceive the social media content of their peers, facilitating an environment for social comparison to take place; and may influence adolescents to believe their peers lives are better than their own (Ho et al., 2016; Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021). Adolescents may also judge and compare themselves to the appearance of others, evaluating themselves in comparison to their peers (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Ho et al., 2016).

When used as a means for social comparison, social media can be harmful to adolescents' mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Ho et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017). Social comparison can lead to anxiety, envy, "decreased self-esteem, increased body shame, depression and overall lower relational health" (Casares & Binkley, 2021, p. 3; Seabrook et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017). All of these

consequences negatively influence the mental health and wellbeing of adolescents; and are an important part of assessment for counsellors.

In the research on social media and social comparison, female identifying adolescents have been identified as a group that are more at risk to the negative consequences of social comparison than their peers (Schimmele et al., 2021). Female identifying adolescents are more likely to partake in social comparison and may use social media predominantly for social comparison purposes (Ho et al., 2016). Further, female identifying adolescents have also been found to place greater emphasis on social comparison as a part of their assessment of self-worth (Schimmele et al., 2021). This results in social comparison posing a greater threat to female identifying adolescents' mental health and wellbeing, compared to other adolescents (Schimmele et al., 2021).

Body Image

Many studies have examined the influence of social media on adolescent body image, with most studies finding social media to negatively influence this aspect of mental health and wellbeing (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; de Vries et al., 2016; Ho et al., 2016; Rodgers et al., 2020; Salomon & Brown, 2019). This relationship can be attributed to characteristics of the adolescence developmental stage, the behaviour of comparison, and adolescents experiencing greater exposure to idealistic images (de Vries et al., 2016; Salomon & Brown, 2019)

As adolescents mature, experience bodily changes, value their peers opinions at an increasing rate, and begin to develop their sexuality, physical appearance “becomes increasingly important to self worth,” and overall mental health and wellbeing (Salomon & Brown, 2019, p. 541). This can result in adolescents being vulnerable to negative body

image; an experience of body dissatisfaction and shame which poses a significant threat to adolescent mental health and wellbeing (de Vries et al., 2016; Salomon & Brown, 2019). Comparison is at the root of negative body image, with social media providing adolescents an environment to compare themselves to idealistic images of their peers and other figures in the media (de Vries et al., 2016). These ideals are often internalized; and when adolescents don't match these ideals, dissatisfaction and shame is the result (Rodgers et al., 2020).

On social media, physical appearance plays a central role in many platform functionalities, whether adolescents are posting pictures, editing pictures, or viewing pictures of others (de Vries et al., 2016). "Many types of social media are highly visual and appearance focused," and offer users heavily edited and idealistic content (Rodgers et al., 2020, p. 400). This quality of many social media platforms can lead adolescents to compare themselves to peers and celebrities, as already described, which can negatively influence body image (de Vries et al., 2016; Rodgers et al., 2020; Salomon & Brown, 2019). The frequency of social media use also influences this relationship, with studies finding greater frequency of social comparison on social media to be related to increased body dissatisfaction (de Vries et al., 2016).

The picture-centered nature of many social media platforms can also result in adolescents giving and receiving more peer appearance feedback (de Vries et al., 2016). Research has examined this phenomenon to determine its influence on mental health and wellbeing; finding that while peer appearance feedback may negatively influence vulnerable adolescents, it does not influence the body image of the typical adolescent (de

Vries et al., 2016). However, as this study was conducted on Dutch adolescents living in Amsterdam, it may not be generalizable to Canadian adolescents (de Vries et al., 2016).

Female identifying adolescents have been found to be particularly vulnerable to the influence of social media on body image (de Vries et al., 2016; Ho et al., 2016). Female identifying adolescents have been found to engage in greater comparison than their peers and to be more effected by this behaviour than their peers, as they place greater importance on self-presentation (Ho et al., 2016). Research has also found female identifying adolescents to internalize beauty ideals at a higher rate than their peers, especially if they are using social media frequently, leading to higher dissatisfaction with their bodies (de Vries et al., 2019). Viewing others social media posts, especially edited posts, has been connected to negative body image; and female adolescents also report a greater pressure to look perfect on social media (de Vries et al., 2019). However, it is important to consider the person of the user, as female identifying adolescents with high confidence, appreciation of differences, and media literacy, were found to be better able to mitigate the negative influence of social media on body image (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).

While the research on social media use and body image focuses on the negative influence of social media, there also do exist body-positive communities adolescents can access on social media (Reid & Weigle, 2014). These communities can support adolescents who struggle with body image by providing a space to interact with peers who are experiencing similar things (Reid & Weigle, 2014).

Risky Behaviours

Adolescence is a developmental stage “characterized by suboptimal decisions,” and high peer influence, which may influence adolescents to participate in risky behaviours that may be harmful to their mental health and wellbeing (Eleuteri et al., 2017, p. 355). For today’s adolescents, social media is another factor that can influence risky behaviours, as social media provides another context for peer influence to take place (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Further, on social media, risky behaviours are often normalized and celebrated, increasing adolescents’ desire to partake in them (Eleuteri et al., 2017; Reid & Weigle, 2014). Social media may influence adolescents to participate in risky behaviours including: drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; sexual self-presentation and sexting; cyberbullying and violence; and non-suicidal self-harm, suicide, and eating disorders (Doornwaard et al., 2017; Eleuteri et al., 2017; Reid & Weigle, 2014). These behaviours can be harmful for adolescents’ mental health and wellbeing; and gauging whether or not adolescents are engaging in these risky behaviours is an integral part of social media use assessment (Reid & Weigle, 2014). These specific risky behaviours will be explored further in the following sections.

Research has attempted to examine which adolescents may be more at risk of participating in risky behaviours. In a survey study of 1000 US adolescents aged 12-14, Ohannessian and Vannucci (2020) found a greater frequency of social media use to be related to greater participation of risky behaviours for early adolescents, especially for adolescents with pre-existing behavioural challenges. Further, Ohannessian and Vannucci (2020) found male identifying adolescents to be more vulnerable to the influence of social media use on risky behaviours than their female counterparts. However, these

results may reflect their definition of risky behaviours as the study focused on cyberbullying, violence, and other externalizing behaviours (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Overall, more research is needed to determine what leads to risky social media use and what protective factors promote healthy use (Vente et al., 2020).

Sexual Self-Presentation

As described in the ‘Sexual Identity’ section, social media can provide adolescents a safe environment to learn about and explore their sexuality (Doornwaard et al., 2017). However, as using social media to explore sexuality becomes normalized, so do other sexual behaviours including sexual self-presentation (Doornwaard et al., 2017).

Sexual self-presentation refers to posting “images in which someone is scarcely dressed, has a sexy gaze, or in which sexual willingness is suggested;” and is an increasingly common behaviour of adolescents, that they partake in for a variety of reasons (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020, p. 1). If adolescents are frequently exposed to sexual content, this may normalize sexual behaviours (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). Sexualized self-presentation may also reflect adolescents’ developmental stage and desire to be accepted by their peers (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). According to Van Ouytsel et al. (2020) peer norms, or attitude of peers about sexualized images, hold the largest influence on adolescents’ willingness to post sexualized pictures.

While this type of social media behaviour may support adolescents sexual exploration, it can also come with negative consequences, if adolescents are victim to sexualized harassment or bullying (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). This is especially prevalent for female identifying adolescents, who simultaneously experience more pressure to post sexualized images and receive greater consequences for doing so (Van Ouytsel et al.,

2020). In addition to the reasons described above for posting sexualized pictures, female identifying adolescents may feel it is expected of them to post these, influencing their decision to partake in this behaviour (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). And in addition to sexualized harassment and bullying, female identifying adolescents may experience slut shaming as a consequence (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). Assessing if and how adolescents' experience these behaviours is needed to assess for their influence on mental health and wellbeing.

Sexting

Sexting is another sexual behaviour that can both support adolescents' sexual identity development and negatively influence their mental health and wellbeing; and should be assessed by counsellors. Sexting refers to "sending or receiving sexually explicit or sexually suggestive photos, videos, or messages;" and while it isn't a common behaviour of adolescents, some adolescents do sext for a variety of reasons (Vente et al., 2020, p. 2). Adolescents may sext to explore their sexual identity, due to pressure or boredom, to attract interest or popularity, or at the request of a partner (Reid & Weigle, 2014; Vente et al., 2020). In particular, female identifying adolescents "are more likely to be pressured, coerced, or blackmailed into sexting, particularly by male peers" (Vente et al., 2020, p. 2). The risks with sexting, are that images may be forwarded to others, and adolescents may experience cyberbullying or harassment due to this (Eleuteri et al., 2017; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Vente et al., 2020). This can negatively influence mental health and wellbeing, as will be described in greater detail in the following section.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is a form of aggressive and repeated interpersonal abuse that takes place in an online environment (McLouglin et al., 2018; Meyer, 2021). Cyberbullying can include “spreading rumours or sending hate messages; creating profiles, webpages, or videos for humiliation; distributing inappropriate photos or videos; and sending threatening, malicious or hurtful messages” (Reid & Weigle, 2014, p. 75). Cyberbullying is hard to monitor and easy to hide, allowing it to be a riskier context for bullying than in offline environments (McLouglin et al., 2018; Reid & Weigle, 2014). Cyberbullying has also been correlated with offline bullying, and is harder to escape than offline bullying as it follows adolescents wherever they go (Espelage & Hong, 2017; Reid & Weigle, 2014).

While studies differ on their statistic of cyberbullying prevalence, unfortunately the number appears to be high (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Espelage & Hong, 2017; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Many adolescents experience cyberbullying, as the bullier, the bullied, or both, with adolescents themselves recognizing cyberbullying to be a considerable risk of social media use on mental health and wellbeing (O’Reilly et al., 2018; Reid & Weigle, 2014).

Cyberbullying can be devastating to an adolescent’s social world (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Espelage & Hong, 2017; McLouglin et al., 2018; Meyer, 2021; Reid & Weigle, 2014). Witnessing, being victimized by, and perpetrating, cyberbullying can lead to isolation, anxiety, depression, low self esteem, self harm, suicidality, academic challenges, and sleep loss, all of which negatively impact adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Espelage & Hong, 2017; McLouglin et al., 2018; O’Reilly et al., 2018; Reid & Weigle, 2014). Cyberbullying can also impact adolescent

identity development, making it harder for adolescents to find their true selves (Meyer, 2021). While all adolescents who experience cyberbullying are likely to experience negative impacts on their mental health and wellbeing, those who both bully and are bullied are said to suffer the most (McLouglin et al., 2018). When assessing the influence of social media use, counsellors should assess for cyberbullying, whether clients are witnesses, victims, or perpetrators, and how clients perceive the impact of this on their mental health and wellbeing (Espelage & Hong, 2017).

Non-Suicidal Self-Harm

Non-suicidal self-harm (NSSI) refers to self-injurious behaviour absent of the intent to take one's life (Brown et al., 2018). NSSI is a prevalent concern for adolescents, which social media has influenced by allowing adolescents access to self-harm communities and engagement with others who self harm (Brown et al., 2018; Reid & Weigle, 2014). While for some adolescents social media may offer supportive NSSI communities that support healing, for other adolescents social media may act to promote, normalize, or trigger NSSI (Brown et al., 2018; Reid & Weigle, 2014).

For adolescents who participate in NSSI, social media can offer a safe space to share their experiences and connect with others, supporting social connection and mental health and wellbeing (Lewis et al., 2012; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Seong et al., 2021). NSSI communities may provide adolescents with a sense of belonging, encouragement for recovery, and suggestions for how to heal, supporting the reduction of NSSI behaviours (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2012; Vente et al., 2020). Connecting with others who share similar experiences can be beneficial in supporting adolescents to feel less alone, and by providing them with a space to self disclose their

experience (Lewis et al., 2012). By participating in NSSI communities and engaging with others on social media in the ways described, adolescent mental health and wellbeing can benefit (Lewis et al., 2012; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Vente et al., 2020).

While connecting with NSSI communities and with others who engage in NSSI can support mental health and wellbeing, there are also risks associated with such engagement. If adolescents are exposed to NSSI content they may experience changes in their perceptions of NSSI behaviour (Vente et al., 2020). Engagement in NSSI content and discussions on social media may normalize, reinforce, or promote NSSI behaviours for adolescents (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2012; Logrieco et al., 2021; Reid & Weigle, 2014). There is also the risk of adolescents learning more harmful behaviours; and how-to videos, and tips to hide NSSI, do exist on social media (Lewis et al., 2012; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Vente et al., 2020). Further, NSSI content may be triggering for individuals who have previously or are still engaging in NSSI (Brown et al., 2018; Lewis et al., 2012). Exposure to NSSI content may also prevent adolescents from getting the help they need (Lewis et al., 2012).

When considering the potential risks of NSSI community engagement, counsellors should be aware that it is mostly individuals who are already engaging in NSSI that access these communities and that if individuals are engaging in NSSI they are also likely to be accessing these communities (Lewis et al., 2012; Vente et al., 2020). When working with adolescents who self harm, counsellors should be assessing their participation in NSSI communities, their engagement with others who self injure, and how this influences their mental health and wellbeing (Lewis et al., 2012; Brown et al., 2018).

Suicidality

Suicidality refers to suicidal ideation, plans, and attempts; and is the leading cause of death for adolescents worldwide (Seong et al., 2021). Suicidality and social media interact in a similar manner to NSSI, as adolescents who experience suicidality can connect with others and communities of others who experience suicidality on social media (Reid & Weigle, 2014). And while there exist supports for adolescents who experience suicidality on social media, there also exists information on how to die by suicide, supporting and hindering mental health and wellbeing respectively (Reid & Weigle, 2014; Seong et al., 2021).

When assessing adolescent social media use for suicidality, there are a few factors counsellors should keep in mind. Research on suicidality has shown that adolescents who post suicide related content are more likely to experience suicidal ideation and attempt suicide (Seong et al., 2021). With this, there is a risk that if adolescents are only sharing their suicidality on social media it is likely that only other adolescents will find out, and how they respond to this may have consequences (Reid & Weigle, 2014). This speaks to the necessity of counsellors assessing for suicidality and suicidal social media behaviours when appropriate in the counselling room. If adolescents are experiencing suicidality, counsellors should assess if they are engaging with others about this and if they are creating posts about their suicidality on social media.

Research has also found social media use itself to be linked to suicidality (Biernesser, 2019). “Use of social media has been correlated with adolescent suicidal thoughts and behaviours, as well as with common risk factors for suicide such as self-harm, depression, anxiety, and sleep disturbance” (Biernesser, 2019, p. 8). Particularly,

heavy and problematic social media use has been linked to suicidality (Biernesser, 2019). That said, social media use can also provide benefits to adolescents who experience and are at risk of suicidality, by providing an environment where adolescents can experience social support, belonging, connection, and acceptance (Biernesser, 2019; Seong et al., 2021). As with all social media behaviours, this speaks to the importance of assessing how adolescents are using social media within each behavioural type.

Eating Disorders

Viewing, posting, and interacting, with eating disorder content, is another behaviour of adolescent social media use that has benefits and risks for adolescent mental health and wellbeing. And similarly to the last two sections, connecting with others who experience eating disorders and engaging in eating disorder communities can be supportive and harmful for adolescents depending on the content accessed (Reid & Weigle, 2014). This can be supportive for adolescents if they are supported to heal or experience connection; and harmful if they are viewing pro-eating disorder content as this may trigger, promote, or normalize these behaviours (Logrieco et al., 2021; Turner & Lefevre, 2017). Social media can also be harmful if adolescents are participating in social comparison, which can negatively influence body image leading to eating disorder behaviours (Logrieco et al., 2021; Turner & Lefevre, 2017). Research has found this risk to be higher for female identifying adolescents than their peers (Logrieco et al., 2021).

When assessing adolescents' social media use for its influence on mental health and wellbeing, counsellors should assess if adolescents are viewing eating disorder content, and engaging in eating disorder communities, as this can influence their mental health and wellbeing.

Other Harmful Content

While the previous sections addressed many potentially harmful content areas that adolescents can access on social media, there exist other harmful content areas that have accompanying harmful risks. These include, but are not limited to, violence, photo shopped images, and rants (O'Reilly et al., 2018). If adolescents are accessing content that is potentially harmful on social media, this should be assessed for its influence on their mental health and wellbeing, as this content can be detrimental or damaging to adolescents (O'Reilly et al., 2018).

Assessing Overall Behaviours – The See-Saw

When assessing how adolescent social media behaviours influence their mental health and wellbeing it is important to remember that for the general adolescent social media use includes many behaviours, elements, and dimensions (Weinstein, 2018). “The presence of one negative element is not indicative of a wholly negative experience, nor is the absence of one negative element confirmation that social media use is positive or benign” (Weinstein, 2018, p. 3617-3618). Adolescents may have different experiences for different dimensions, and may also have both negative and positive experiences for the same dimension (Weinstein, 2018). What this implies is a see-saw effect of social media use on mental health and wellbeing; with different social media experiences being able to tip the see-saw positively and negatively in terms of its influence on mental health and wellbeing (Weinstein, 2018). This model encourages counsellors to assess multiple dimensions of an adolescent’s social media use, including multiple behaviours, as this section has described (Weinstein, 2018). This research further adds to this capstone, by inviting counsellors to consider the prevalence and prominence of social media

behaviours in relation to the see-saw; with prevalence referring to frequency of a behaviour and prominence referring to the memorability and influence of the behaviour (Weinstein, 2018). When assessing adolescents' social media behaviours counsellors should consider the see-saw in terms of differing influences of different behaviours, and the prevalence and prominence of such behaviours (Weinstein, 2018).

Conclusion of Behaviours

This section examined several common behaviours that adolescents participate in on social media, emphasizing that how adolescents behave on social media influences how social media will influence their mental health and wellbeing. The following section will address the person of the user, as how an individual behaves on social media is reflective of who they are as a person.

Person of the User

Social media use influences the mental health and wellbeing of every adolescent differently (Dolan, 2019). Individual differences influence social media experiences (Weinstein, 2018). For many adolescents, social media use is not harmful; it is only the minority that are at risk (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020). Frequency of use, platforms used, forms of use, and behaviours influence this risk, and all reflect the individual who uses social media, making the person of the user an important part of the assessment (Dolan, 2019). This section will examine research that discusses how the person of the user impacts how social media influences their mental health and wellbeing. It will discuss adolescent vulnerabilities, protective factors, and the influence of social location, loneliness and depression, personality traits, and attachment.

Vulnerabilities

Many studies have tried to ascertain what makes adolescents vulnerable to the risks of social media. And as humans are complex, so too are the results (O'Reilly, 2020). One theme that has emerged is the 'poor-gets-poorer' effect, the idea that if individuals are already experiencing difficulties offline, social media will exacerbate these (Odgers, 2018; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020; Weinstein, 2018). Social media reflects, "the complexities of the offline social environment and the risks and benefits it may pose to mental health" (Seabrook et al., 2016, p. 12). Those with mental health difficulties, lower social emotional wellbeing, lower life satisfaction, pre-existing conduct problems, and those lacking social skills, may be more vulnerable to the risks of social media than their peers (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Beyens et al., 2020; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020; Sheldon et al., 2021). However, these adolescents may, in some cases, be able to better communicate with their peers online than they can offline, which would produce the opposite effects (Weinstein, 2018). Like counselling other individual differences that influence how social media is experienced are envy and fear of missing out (FOMO), influencing depression, and stress and anxiety respectively (Sheldon et al., 2021; Weinstein, 2018). Finally, a few other individual differences that may negatively influence social media's influence on mental health and wellbeing are high social comparison, cognitive styles that involve rumination and brooding, and lack of belonging (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).

Protective Factors

While much of the research has focused on vulnerabilities, some protective factors have also been addressed. In their study of active and passive social media use,

Pagani et al. (2011) found self-identity and social identity expressiveness to be positively linked to active social media use, use that typically benefits mental health and wellbeing. In another study, individuals with a higher sense of purpose in life were found to have lower sensitivity to social comparison and feedback, protecting their mental health and wellbeing (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). Overall, social media use reflects adolescents' offline lives; and can amplify positive aspects of adolescents' offline experiences (Weinstein, 2018).

Social Location

Studies have also considered how social location impacts the influence of social media on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. Socioeconomic status is one factor that has been found to influence social media use (Odgers, 2018). A study conducted in the UK, and replicated in the US, found that adolescents living in lower income or lower status households generally had higher social media usage, which can negatively influence mental health and wellbeing (Booker et al., 2018). With this, it has been found that adolescents, who experience greater adversity in their offline lives, are more likely to experience the negative influences of social media (Odgers, 2018).

Age is another aspect of social location that research has examined. As discussed in the 'Behaviours' section, adolescent development influences how adolescents behave online (de Vries et al., 2016). Age can also be a risk factor due to self-regulation, if adolescents are using social media at inappropriate hours, or overusing social media generally (Schimmele et al., 2021).

Race, ethnicity, and culture, also influence adolescent social media use and its consequences (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Culture may influence which platforms

adolescents use and how they communicate on social media (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). More research is needed to support the understanding of cultural influences on social media use (de Vries et al., 2016).

Highly relevant to this capstone is research that has examined how gender impacts the influence of social media on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. Within this research, many studies have identified female identifying adolescents to be more susceptible to the negative influences of social media than their male counterparts (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Schimmele et al., 2021). Studies have found female identifying adolescents to use social media in higher amounts and frequency than their peers, which can decrease mental health and wellbeing, especially if adolescents are using social media passively, participating in social comparison, or are experiencing cyberbullying (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Bányai et al., 2017; Casares & Binkley, 2021; Frison & Eggermont, 2020). Overall, Schimmele et al. (2021) found that for female identifying adolescents, time spent on social media had a stronger correlation with decreased mental health and wellbeing than male identifying adolescents.

Studies have also found that female identifying adolescents use social media in a different manner than their peers, which may explain the higher influence of social media on their mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 2021). In comparison to their peers, female identifying adolescents are more likely to seek feedback and to participate in peer comparison, which can negatively influence aspects of their mental health and wellbeing including identity development and body image (Casares & Binkley, 2021; Salomon & Brown, 2019). Female identifying adolescents have also been found to spend more time and have greater interest in image-centered platforms such as Instagram and

Snapchat, than their peers, which can further impact social media's influence (Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Additionally, female identifying adolescents "are more likely than their male counterparts to identify with social media figures and widely choose to identify with figures who promote problematic messages that a thin body image is ideal," (Casares & Binkley, 2021, p. 1). This can influence body image, self-esteem, and other aspects of mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 202).

Individual differences among female identifying adolescents are also important to consider (Salomon & Brown, 2019). Female identifying adolescents who partake in high self-monitoring, who seek approval from their peers, and who have low self-esteem, are especially at risk for body surveillance and body shame, negatively influencing their mental health and wellbeing (Rodgers et al., 2020; Salomon & Brown, 2019).

While female identifying adolescents are prone to social media use that negatively influences their mental health and wellbeing, they are also more likely to engage with social media in ways that positively influence their mental health and wellbeing. For many female identifying adolescents, social media, rather than gaming, is an important tool for maintaining friendships and social connections (Booker et al., 2018; Brandtzaeg, 2012; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). Female identifying adolescents are also more likely than other adolescents to communicate with peers and engage in self-disclosure, both forms of active social media use that support mental health and wellbeing (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020).

Loneliness and Depression

Loneliness is another factor that influences how individuals use social media (Nowland et al., 2018). In a study of 1100 Flemish adolescents with data collected at

three points, Frison and Eggermont (2016) found lonely adolescents to spend more time passively and actively using Facebook; with passive use decreasing adolescent perception of friend support and decreasing mental health and wellbeing, and active use enhancing adolescent perception of friend support and benefiting mental health and wellbeing.

Nowland et al.'s (2018) study had similar findings, in that social media use increased loneliness by displacing offline relationships and also decreased loneliness by enhancing relationships. From these two studies, it appears that social media and loneliness have a non-linear relationship, with loneliness being linked to both passive and active use (Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Nowland et al., 2018).

Studies have also examined how depression influences adolescents' social media use. Adolescents who experience depression may use social media to try and fulfill unmet social needs, which can elevate mental health and wellbeing, but can also lead to problematic usage (Scherr & Brunet, 2017). Further, adolescents who experience depression are more likely to perceive interactions on social media as negative, which can decrease the potential benefits of social media use for mental health and wellbeing (Seabrook et al., 2016). That said, the negative effects of social media use for adolescents who experience depression may be mitigated by in person contact, as this is a protective factor (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020).

Personality Traits

Substantial research on personality traits has indicated that personality can be defined by five factors: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Whiston, 2017). These factors make up the 'Five Factor Model' of personality; and have been examined for their influence on social media usage, with

research suggesting neuroticism and extroversion influence use (Scherr & Brunet, 2017; Trull, 2012; Whiston, 2017). High neuroticism has been found to be associated with the frequency and duration of Facebook use (Scherr & Brunet, 2017). High extroversion has been linked to more Facebook friends, more group participation, more daily interactions with friends, greater amount of logins, and longer durations of use (Scherr & Brunet, 2017). These personality traits influence how individuals use social media, impacting how social media influences mental health and wellbeing.

Attachment

Attachment is another aspect of the person of the user that research has examined for its influence on social media use. Attachment style influences how one shows up in relationships, engages with social media to support relationships; and thus influences how social media influences mental health and wellbeing (Young et al., 2020). For individuals who are high in attachment avoidance, social media may allow for self-presentation management and relationship building, increasing mental health and wellbeing (Young et al., 2020). However, social media use may also decrease mental health and wellbeing due to an individual's anxiety of rejection and if individuals are using social media passively to monitor other people's lives (Young et al., 2020). For individuals who are high in attachment avoidance, social media may be used to maintain relationships, increasing mental health and wellbeing, or may have an insignificant influence on mental health and wellbeing, if individuals lack interest in maintaining relationships (Young et al., 2020). Overall, attachment style can be understood as a moderator between social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing, "rather than sole a predictor of use" (Young et al., 2020, p. 2).

Conclusion of Person of the User

This section discussed how individual aspects of the person of the user influence social media usage, and its influence on mental health and wellbeing. The following section will describe how the user's perception of their social media use impacts how their social media use influences mental health and wellbeing.

Social Media's Role

While assessing for frequency of use, platforms used, forms of use, behaviours, and the person of the user, supports counsellors to understand how social media use influences mental health and wellbeing, another important consideration is how the adolescent themselves perceives their social media use and the role social media plays in their lives (Reid & Weigle, 2014; Seabrook et al., 2016). This section will discuss how adolescent perception of social media use can influence their mental health and wellbeing. It will also describe the potential benefits and risks of social media that adolescents perceive.

Adolescent Perception

How adolescents perceive their social media use, impacts how social media influences their mental health and wellbeing (Seabrook et al., 2016). And contrary to the dominant discourse, many adolescents perceive their social media use to be beneficial, recognizing that social media use can support relationships, social capital, expression, identity development, and more (McLoughlin et al., 2018; Reich et al., 2012; Verduyn et al., 2017; Weinstein, 2018). Yet, adolescents also acknowledge the negative aspects of social media use, recognizing that while social media can support the aforementioned components of mental health and wellbeing, it too can hinder these components

(Weinstein, 2018). Thus, to understand an adolescent's overall experience on social media, counsellors should attend to the adolescent's perception of both benefits and risks of use (Dolan, 2019; Weinstein, 2018).

Potential Benefits

One main theme that emerges from research on adolescents' perception of social media's influence on mental health and wellbeing is social media's ability to support social connections (Best et al., 2014; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020; Viner et al., 2019). Developmentally, building and maintaining friendships is an important part of adolescents' lives; and if adolescents' perceive their social media use to be supporting this, mental health and wellbeing is benefited (O'Reilly, 2020; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017; Sheldon et al., 2021). In fact, a user's perception of social connection and relationship, or social support, influences social media's impact on mental health and wellbeing; and has been found to be more influential than the actual support itself (Seabrook et al., 2016; Verduyn et al., 2017).

Another adolescent identified benefit of social media is social media's ability to decrease stress by acting as a short-term distraction from daily life stressors (O'Reilly, 2020). If social media use is perceived in this way, it can empower adolescents, supporting their mental health and wellbeing (Casares & Binkley, 2021; O'Reilly, 2020).

Finally, another theme that emerges from the research, is how some adolescents perceive social media to be an outlet for identity expression and a medium where they can find communities to which they feel they belong (Best et al., 2014; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2020). If adolescents perceive their social media use in this way, again mental health and wellbeing benefits (Best et al., 2014).

While this section does not address all the potential benefits of use, it is included to provide a base of knowledge around how an adolescent might positively perceive their social media usage influencing mental health and wellbeing, and to encourage counsellors to assess how adolescents view social media's role in their lives.

Potential Risks

Studies have also examined the potential risks of social media that adolescents identify. One theme that emerges from this research is that adolescents fear using social media too much (O'Reilly, 2020; Sheldon et al., 2021). While many adolescents experience a compelling need to use social media, they simultaneously recognize that such a high frequency of use can negatively influence mental health and wellbeing (O'Reilly, 2020). Other risks identified by many adolescents are cyberbullying and exposure to triggering and harmful content, which adolescents also recognize to hold the potential to negatively influence mental health and wellbeing (Best et al., 2014; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; O'Reilly, 2020). Further, other perceptions that negatively influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing are: a users perception of having wasted time, brooding or worrying, and information overload (Verduyn et al., 2017).

When considering and assessing for the potential risks of social media use, counsellors should be aware that while many adolescents are cognizant of the risks of social media, access to social media is an integral part of their lives (O'Reilly, 2020). When assessing for the potential risks of social media from the adolescents' perspective, counsellors would do well to provide an open, non-judgmental space for adolescents to share their experiences with social media and the role it plays in their lives (Reid & Weigle, 2014).

Similarly to benefits, this section does not address all potential risks from an adolescents' perspective; and is provided with the intention of establishing a basic knowledge base of adolescent perceived risks and to encourage assessment of adolescent social media risk perception.

Conclusion of Social Media's Role

Assessing adolescents' perception of their social media use is important, as it impacts how social media influences their mental health and wellbeing. This section described the relationship between adolescent perception and social media influence; and provided a brief commentary on the potential benefits and risks adolescents may perceive. Social media plays an important role in adolescents' lives, and adolescent's perception of the role it plays and how it both positively and negatively influences their mental health and wellbeing should be assessed.

Summary of Findings

Social media's influence on female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing is complex and subjective; and there is much to consider in terms of what should be included in an assessment of social media's influence on mental health and wellbeing. This chapter examined the current research on social media and adolescents to determine categories to be included in such an assessment including: duration and frequency of use, social media platforms, forms of use, behaviours, the person of the user, and social media's role. The following chapter will propose a study to test the utility of including these categories when assessing the influence of social media on female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

Chapter 3 - Analysis and Conclusion

The last chapter examined research that has been conducted on adolescent social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing, and research that speaks to the utility of assessing adolescent social media use. This chapter will discuss the purpose of this research, the limitations uncovered; and will propose a study to solidify a framework for counsellors to use to assess female identifying adolescents' social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing.

Purpose

The purpose of this capstone project was to explore what counsellors should assess when working with female identifying adolescents in terms of social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing; with the intention of developing a framework for counsellors to use to assess for such influence. To do this, this capstone examined research on the utility of assessing social media use and research on the influence of adolescent social media use on mental health and wellbeing, to determine categories to be included in such a framework. These categories were identified in Chapter 2 and include: the duration and frequency of social media use, what social media platforms adolescents use, what forms of use they partake in, how adolescents are behaving online, the person of the adolescent user, and the role social media plays in their life. The purpose of identifying these categories was to develop a framework counsellors could use when sitting with female-identifying adolescent clients, to allow them to assess social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing. While this capstone was able to identify categories to be included in such an assessment, the development of

these categories and their meaning were limited by the current research. These limitations will be described in further detail in the following section.

Limitations

Through examining research on adolescent social media use, social media's influence on mental health and wellbeing, and the utility of assessing for such use, this capstone encountered limitations in the current research. These included a lack of research on what should be assessed in terms of social media use and its influence on adolescent mental health and wellbeing, and limitations within studies that examine the influence of social media on adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

As outlined in Chapter 1, only a handful of studies address the need to assess adolescent social media use, with even less studies offering what counsellors should assess. This was a limitation when writing this capstone, as there exists little research as to what counsellors should assess in terms of adolescent social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing, the research question this capstone set out to answer. This capstone is limited by this scarcity of research and is largely based on research that addresses the influence of social media use.

This capstone also encountered limitations within the research that examines the influence of social media use on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. When examining adolescent social media use, many studies fail to distinguish between types of use and platforms used, which has large influence on social media's influence on mental health and wellbeing (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Schonning et al., 2020; Trifero & Gerson, 2019). Many studies also only look at group effects, focus on the negative influence of social media rather than the positive, and fail to consider adolescents'

perspectives and the influence of gender (Beyens et al., 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2018; Schonning et al., 2020). These limitations influence study findings, which influenced this capstone project, as it was unclear how some of the identified categories of social media use influence adolescent mental health and wellbeing. This capstone attempted to work around these limitations by including distinguishing factors of social media use, including type of use, platforms used, and gender, within the proposed framework.

Research Proposal

Based on the current research and limitations, this capstone proposes that future research should be conducted to determine what counsellors should be assessing in terms of female identifying adolescent social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing. The remainder of this chapter will propose a research study that could be used to develop such an assessment.

Study Aims

The purpose of the proposed study is to develop a framework to assess for the influence of social media on Canadian female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing. For this proposed study, social media will continue to be generally defined as any technological platform that allows individuals to create, share, interact, and communicate with other users, inclusive of social networking sites and instant messengers (Coyne et al., 2014; Dienlin & Johannes, 2020; Reid & Weigle, 2014; Schimmele et al., 2021). Canadian female identifying adolescents will continue to be generally defined as individuals between the ages of 12 and 19 that live in Canada and self-identify as female; and mental health and wellbeing will continue to be defined as an individual's emotional and psychological state of being (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020).

Theoretical Orientation

The proposed study will continue to utilize a constructivist framework, believing that each adolescent's experience with social media is different and thus influences their mental health and wellbeing differently (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The framework this study proposes to develop acknowledges the subjectivity of social media use and its influence, by encouraging counsellors to complete individual assessments when working with adolescent clients.

Methods

Sample Selection. The proposed study will recruit 30 female identifying adolescents through middle schools, high schools, universities, and colleges, across Canada; attaining parental consent as needed (O'Reilly, 2020). In the hopes of attaining a culturally diverse sample, multiple schools, both public and private, will be used. Demographic data of participants will be collected and shared with the data presentation for transparency. This will include participants: age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, ability, religion, ethnicity, and other cultural identities. The hope is that the sample recruited will be diverse enough to support the development of a framework to assess for the influence of social media on Canadian female identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing.

Procedures. The proposed study will utilize a qualitative grounded theory approach to develop a framework to assess the influence of social media on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. This study will conduct individual interviews with study participants to ensure participant answers are not skewed by others' perspectives. Study participants will be asked the same open-ended questions to determine what categories

adolescents perceive to be influential to their social media use and its influence on their mental health and wellbeing. Study participants will be asked about the influence of the duration and frequency of social media use, social media platforms, forms of use, online behaviours, the person of the adolescent user, and the role of social media, to determine if these are necessary categories to be included in a framework to assess for the influence of social media use on adolescent mental health and wellbeing. Study participants will also be asked to share any categories that may be missing in terms of adolescent social media use and its influence on mental health and wellbeing. These questions will be asked in the hope that they will provide study participants space to share their lived experience with social media use and its influence on their mental health and wellbeing.

Data Analysis. The proposed study will utilize a thematic design to uncover themes that emerge in the data. To do so, participant interviews will be transcribed into textual data and then coded by a select group of 5 coders (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Coders will work together to determine codes, code the textual data, integrate the coded data into themes, and consult with one another as needed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is anticipated that themes will arise around the categories uncovered in Chapter 2. It is also anticipated that unaddressed themes may emerge.

Data Presentation. The proposed study recommends that the themes from the data are presented in a narrative passage within a journal article, in order to share the framework to others in the academic and greater community. The narrative passage will describe the themes that emerged from the participant interviews, incorporating multiple participant perspectives and direct quotes from the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The narrative passage will also include a process model, describing how the

themes that emerged in the study may lead to a framework counsellors can use to assess the influence of social media on adolescent mental health and wellbeing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Conclusion

This capstone project set out to determine what counsellors should assess in terms social media use and its influence on female-identifying adolescent mental health and wellbeing. As outlined in this chapter, this capstone was able to uncover categories that are likely to be necessary to include in such an assessment, based on the current research. As discussed, the current research has limitations, which is why this chapter proposed a research study to solidify what categories should be used in such an assessment. By drawing on the knowledge of today's adolescents, the proposed study hopes to address gaps in the research and provide a practical lens to such an assessment.

This project has personal significance. As an emerging counsellor who has a desire to work with adolescents, the ability to assess the influence of social media on adolescent mental health and wellbeing feels crucial in today's climate. While social media assessment is not a normative part of counselling assessment at the present, the way I see it, social media's large influence on many adolescents within our society deems assessment necessary. This capstone project provided insight into what components of adolescent social media use should be included in such an assessment. As I move forward in my career, I will take this knowledge with me.

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